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A
L E T T E R
TO A
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT;
PROPOSING A
PLAN OF REGULATIONS
FOR THE BETTER AND MORE COMPLEAT
MANNING THE NAVY:

WHICH WILL COMPREHEND THE
FOLLOWING ADVANTAGES:

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| I. The Abolition of that unnatural Practice of pressing our Seamen. | IV. The Abolition of Pressing will be productive of an immense Saving of the Public Money. |
| II. The emphatical strengthening of the Power of the Crown. | V. A moderate Increase of our Seamen's Wages will be trifling, when compared with the Savings made by abolishing Pressing; and will not only be perfectly equitable, but political. |
| III. The relieving our Merchants from the Danger of losing their Property; and sometimes from the Loss of it, by Sea, in consequence of Pressing. | |

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L. E. T. F. R.
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

PLAN OF RECENT AFFAIRS

THE HISTORY OF THE
REIGN OF THE LATE KING
OF THE ROMANS

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L E T T E R, &c.

THE Navy of Great Britain being the great bulwark of the nation, and the defence and security of it's trade and wealth, I lay it down for an undeniable maxim, *That whatever can contribute towards the improvement or perfection of the Navy, either in the whole, or in any of it's branches, ought by all means to be adopted.* This, the following plan will certainly do to a very
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great degree ; and the immense utility comprehended in the subject-matter of it, being as clear and evident as the sun at noon, naturally infers the necessity of the most speedy measures of adoption towards the establishing of them.

I refer it to our Politicians, whether any additional argument of expedition may be drawn from the present state of Europe, in the point of peace and war.

This plan is so contrived, that it at once proposes to advance the power of the Prince and the freedom of the Subject : It strengthens the former, and, at the same time renders the service of seamen in the navy, consistent with that liberty to which they were born, and have a right to, as Britons ; which hitherto has not been the case.

And it will remove great evils, which that valuable and respectable body of men among us, the Merchants, labour under in their commerce ; whereby their property and fortunes have been often endangered, and frequently lost.—And add to these, it will create an immense saving to the public.

The first eminent branch of utility I provide for, is ; that it will strengthen the prerogative of the Crown.

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To produce this effect, not only muster-rolls must be taken of all the seamen in the Merchants service, and transmitted into a proper office, to be under the direction of the Admiralty; but also, lists of all persons in Great Britain between the age of eighteen years and fifty, who get their livelihood upon the water; and, that the numbers of these be also returned into that office.

This method will soon give the government a perfect knowledge of the whole number of men in the kingdom, fit to serve in the navy; and, will produce the vast advantage of a constant and regular supply of seamen. By this means, the measures of government will never be frustrated, nor retarded for want of seamen upon any expedition; but, upon his Majesty's Proclamation, a speedy supply of any number may at any time be had; whereby a fleet may easily be manned; and that, from those parts which lie nearest to the port; to which (according to the exigency) they are ordered to repair.

Thus will this plan, when established by an act of the legislature, add great strength to the prerogative in the article of manning the navy.

At this day, an armed force may hunt after seamen; and when they have found them, may captivate and lead them away, by

mere dint of violence, and strength of arm: and at present, no man is criminal for hiding himself from the service. But, when such act is made, his Majesty may then, if he pleases, or the Commissioners of the Admiralty may, by his Majesty's order, at once command all the men in the nation, enrolled for sea-service, to repair on board the King's ships: and such command shall be effectual and obeyed, under the sanction of penalties, which that law will inflict for the breach of it.

Secondly. This plan will render the service in the navy consistent with the freedom of a British subject; as it will put an end to that oppressive and tyrannical measure of power, subversive of the natural liberty of the subject, namely, Pressing. The practice of pressing men for the sea-service without the authority of Parliament, is repugnant to the very idea of Liberty. Every act of it is a violation of the constitution, and, resembles the driving of Christians by Turks to the galleys; and carries in it a perfect air of slavery.

But, to practise this violence upon British seamen, is one of the grossest solecisms that can be in a common-wealth. These are the men, who keep for Britain the dominion of half the globe: these are the men, who are brave, and despise danger; who fight her battles,

battles, and make her terrible round the ocean: these are they, who make our enemies skulk out of port by night, and hurry away by stealth from Europe to both the Indies: these are they, to whom the horrors of the elements are familiar; who bring in through them, all the wealth of our Merchants, from the four quarters of the world: and yet, these men have hitherto been subjected more than any others in this Free Nation, to tyranny, violence, and cruelty. What a degree of barbarity is there, in pressing men out of homeward-bound ships from long voyages! When a man, after suffering many fatigues and hardships, supports himself with the pleasing hopes, that he is returning to his country, to enjoy the comforts of rest and refreshment with his near and dear friends; perhaps, with his wife and children; what distress must it bring upon his mind! how must his hopes be dashed in pieces, and sunk into despair! when he is dragged out of one ship into another, to turn his back upon his place of comfort, to repeat his hardships, till perhaps his constitution is destroyed, and distempers prove his death?—Without these valuable men, we should have no freedom; nor any thing that we could call our own: and yet, these are they of all others, whose liberty suffers most outrages. Preposterous! That the most useful men should suffer the worst treatment, for being the most useful. But, there is no reasoning

reasoning against facts; therefore, I shall mention one or two instances, to prove the ruinous nature and consequence of pressing men out of homeward-bound merchant-ships. In the year 1756 the fleet which went to America was supplied chiefly with seamen taken out of merchant-ships homeward-bound: and what was the consequence? why, the men, who had not the liberty to refresh themselves, and repair their strength on shore, died in America like rotten sheep, to the number of 1400. Dreadful havoc! such numbers as these, the enemy in the bloodiest battle could never have slaughtered; and, this must ever be the natural consequence of that method; for, the like effect flows of course from the like cause. Now I ask, is this a method for supplying seamen, or *destroying them*? Horrid custom! But, the effect has been accordingly; for, very many of them abhor to serve in the navy; and care not where they hide themselves, nor what becomes of them, so that they can escape being pressed. Thus, is the common cause in danger of languishing, for want of a ready supply of seamen, for the present exigencies of government.

The reason hitherto given for the cruel custom of pressing men out of homeward-bound ships, has been the *necessity* of it. This plea is now no more; unless we are resolved to act with our eyes open against natural justice and equity, and the sound policy of
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establishing a constant source, for a full and adequate supply of able and healthy seamen, for every occasion.

The great and inestimable importance of this plan, consists, in the first place, in this ; that it will put an end to that monstrous and unnatural British custom of pressing ; and to the train of evils and iniquities attending it. And on the contrary, it proposes such methods for manning the navy, as will make the service of seamen a reasonable service, such as are consistent with the free constitution of their country ; founded upon principles of justice and duty, tempered with provisions of humanity, and sweetened with periods of rest and refreshment ; which will give them a habit of health, and dispose them to return with cheerfulness to their duty to their King and country, when it happens to be their lot.

As this plan proposes that the names of every ship's company, soon after they come into port, be entered on a muster-roll ; and, that a certain proportion of the men be chosen by lot, out of each ship, for the service of the navy ; it grounds the service of every person upon the strictest equity and fairness, and renders it utterly void of all compulsion and violence ; for, each man so to be chosen will have his chance to escape the lot : and, when it is decided who

is to serve, and a man is taken by lot, it is become his most reasonable duty, cheerfully to enter into the service, and to continue therein for the time prescribed by the act; or if he chuse rather, and can find another willing to go in his stead, if his circumstances induce him to choose it, that indulgence may be allowed him.

It is a just and humane provision to allow him a space of time sufficient to refresh himself, and to recover his health and strength before he repairs on board, and also (when he has served the time appointed) to secure to him uninterrupted liberty for a certain space of time, before he be again subjected to take the chance of being chosen by lot.

The principles of the plan are also perfectly just and equal; as they propose the enrollment, not only of all seamen in the merchants service, but likewise of all persons in the kingdom, who get their livelihood upon the water; because it would be unreasonable that the weight of the duty of sea-service should lie wholly upon one part, and that the other should not serve in turn.—And as by this plan a rotation will be effected, and constantly kept up, every seaman in the nation, and person who gains his living upon the water, may come to serve regularly in the King's ships in his turn. And it may be calculated with such nice circumstances of equity, that those who have no children by marriage, may be required for service, before those who have.

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By the abolishing of the capital evil of Pressing, several subordinate ones, which spring from that pernicious root, will also be abolished; and the contrary advantages, of great consequence, will thereby be gained. Many of the King's ships, instead of being used as prisons for pressed men, may be turned against the enemy; many petty officers and seamen, some of whom are exercised in hunting after men, and others as gaolers for these prisons, will then be at leisure to face the enemy.

The violences too often committed by Press-gangs on the persons they press, and the unhappy accidents, sometimes of maiming, and sometimes even of death itself, which befalls one party or other in the struggle to escape being pressed, will then cease: neither will there be any more danger of the contagious distempers which are often contracted, by close imprisonment on ship-board, and carry off greater numbers of seamen than are slain in battle; on the contrary, the men will go healthy and vigorous to their duty.

To these advantages, which are in themselves very considerable, and extremely worthy of the public regard, though but consequences of the principal objects of the plan; it must not here be forgotten, to add that important consideration of the savings which will accrue to the public, by establishing the said plan into an act of the legislature.

legislature. If national frugality and œconomy be a virtue, here it may be cultivated and improved. There will be no more occasion to allow great sums of money for the expences of numerous press-gangs, which are generally kept on foot in time of war; the hiring of many small vessels to imprison men under hatches, when first pressed, will cease, as will the maintaining of many of the largest ships in the navy for prisons, till the men can be disposed of in other ships. There are also other savings, which under the establishment of the present plan may be effected; namely, by discharging at certain seasons, such as have served longest, or desire to be discharged, when their ships are to lie long in port; as frequently happens in the winter. All these reckoned together will amount to a very great saving. The immense saving of the Public Money will open an easy way to increase seamen's wages from two and twenty shillings and six-pence per month to eight and twenty shillings: which may justly be called easy, because it will be lightly felt in the public accounts, when compared with the vast sums *squandered* away upon Impressing. This proposition is equitable in itself; and will prove a politic one, by the effect it will work in the spirit of our brave seamen hereafter.

The third capital advantage included in this plan, will arise, by putting an end to the evils to which the property and fortune of
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the Merchants are at present exposed. I might here urge the great importance of the Merchant in this trading nation; that without him, Britain would have no foreign trade; that without foreign trade we could not maintain a fleet, nor supply it with seamen; and without a fleet what would become of us?—And it may justly be said of a Merchant who loses his fortune in prosecuting his commerce, that a limb of the commonwealth is broken. What care then, and what tenderneſs ſhould be uſed towards their commerce! And yet, theſe valuable members of the community are, as the caſe now ſtands, expoſed to the danger of loſing their property, and ſometimes to the total loſs of it. One ſort of inſtance is, when ſeamen get twenty or thirty guineas a-piece to ſerve an apprenticeship, and are paid the money down, if in their proceeding to ſea, a man of war happens to meet them, they are ſnapped up and carried off, the ſhip purſues her voyage without them; and the ſaid wages are loſt to the owners. Another great inſtance of violence, which bears the worſt aſpect of all, is, that after a protection is obtained, and the fees of it are paid at the Admiralty-office; for ſecuring to ſeamen an uninterrupted paſſage through their voyage; the ſhip is boarded, the protection is violated, the authority of the Admiralty is trampled upon, the ſeamen are taken by force out of the ſhip, and carried away. This is a ſpecies of tyranny befitting a

Pyrratical State of Barbarians—not of Christians: and all this is acted under the shabby pretence of *Necessity*. But the greatest instance of violence to the property of the Merchants, consists in pressing seamen out of homeward-bound ships, and sending men in their stead, to manage the ships, who know nothing of the matter. Thus, if bad weather happens before they get into port, the ship is exposed to danger; and it sometimes falls out, that for want of the very hands that were forced out of her, both ship and cargo are utterly lost, and therein perhaps the bulk of the Merchant's fortune. These are evils, indeed; and, the act which abolishes pressing, will put an end to them.

Thus it is manifest, that this plan at once comprehends, and provides for, the interest of three great objects; first, the power of the Prince: secondly, the liberty of our brave fellow subjects, our seamen; who, I say, maintain to us our liberty: and, thirdly, the property of our merchants: and therefore, he who is a friend to Prince, People, or Trade, will be a friend to this plan. The great difficulty lay, in calculating a plan, which would at once abolish the evils of Pressing, and secure the power of the Crown in manning the fleet: such a one is now happily formed; the goodness of its principles unrivalled. They are like self-evident propositions; they carry their own evidence in themselves, obvious to
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the understanding, extremely practicable, and adequate to the great ends proposed. But though the plan carries in it all the said advantages; this does not hinder, but that it may perhaps hereafter admit of improvement and refinement, whereby the methods of manning the navy will be raised to a higher degree of perfection.

I have endeavoured to get information, whether any, and what objections may be opposed to this plan, and find there are only two: the first is, that it is an *Experiment*; the second, a *Novelty*. There are experiments physical or natural; and also political. The first sort is very useful, and has greatly advanced the mechanical arts among us. The second, which is the political experiment, is a phrase of a middle sense, and signifies a thing sometimes good, and sometimes bad. I could name several very bad political experiments, which have been made in Britain; and also some good ones. Then, why may not good ones be made again? And if this plan should happen to be on the good side of the distinction, where goes the objection?—The touchstone of a political experiment is, Whether it be hurtful to the prerogative of the Crown, or the rights and liberties of the Subject; or be against the prosperity of trade; or, will draw a heavy expence on the nation, without a suitable advantage.

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But, the principles of this plan will bear the touch, without discovering the least allay. I should wonder if any should oppose the word Experiment, for an objection against this plan, in a country where so many vastly expensive, and withal abortive and fruitless experiments have of late years been made: if political experiments are to be no more encouraged by Parliament, farewell all improvement of national policy; no branch of it will ever grow better. But to shew the necessity of adopting the plan, I shall mention an experiment in the very instance of manning the navy, whereby it will appear, that the present custom of pressing is precarious, and inadequate to it's end. At the beginning of the German war, a sufficient number of seamen could not be procured for the service; whereupon an experiment of offering a gratuity to every seaman who would enter, was devised by the city of London, and followed by every sea-port town in England; this wrought it's effect; and obtained that which neither Pressing, nor his Majesty's Bounty alone, could procure; and the fleet was supplied for the occasions of that time. The adopting of this experiment will for the future render all trifling occasional experiments needless. In a word, the term *Experiment* is absurd; and there would be just as much good sense in calling a clock an experiment, to see whether it's parts would move, if an artist should add another wheel

wheel to it, though the principles of it's motion and rotation are demonstrative, and infallibly certain. Experiment is a fallacious word: insinuating that the grounds of the plan are obscure, and that it is doubtful, whether it will produce good or evil; or, indeed, any thing at all. But there is no man living who can pronounce it to be such, from the clear unbiaſſed dictates of his own reason.

The other objection I am to remark upon, is that it is a Novelty. It is the method of good Logicians, before they enter upon an argument, to ſettle the ſenſe of the terms in the queſtion; therefore I ſhould be glad to hear them define the word *Novelty*. If by it they mean a new trifle, or a new ſomething good for nothing; they may as well affirm, that the ſun is in an eclipse every day at twelve o'clock at noon, as call this plan a novelty. Therefore I muſt ſuppoſe, that the objectors annex no other idea to that word, but the relative notion of newneſs; and, in this ſenſe, the plan is admitted to be a novelty. The Reformation was a novelty, in Harry the Eighth's time; and, if this word had then been terrible, we ſhould all have been idolaters ſtill. The Revolution was as compleat a novelty as ever was in England; wherein the people aſſerted their original right, and ſet up a King of their own. But if this novelty had not taken place, as great a one, though much worſe, would have been eſtabliſhed in it's room; that is, Britons would all have been ſlaves. Many other inſtances might be produced; but theſe are ſufficient to prove that a *Novelty* may be no bad thing.

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When nothing is objected against a plan but it's Novelty—it's being a new thing; this is a certain sign, that it is intrinsically good, and that it's merits cannot be disputed. The aforementioned plan is indeed quite new, and if made into a law, will produce several innovations; such as will attract it's share of praise, among the laws which are admired beyond those of any other nation upon earth, for their abhorrence of cruelty. And I heartily wish, that for the good of the nation, these innovations had been long since found out, and established.

I must not lay down my pen till I have made a quotation from the highest authority; which shall prove the capital importance, and add strength to, and confirm, the merit of the design of the foregoing plan, in favour of our brave meritorious Seamen, the never-ceasing Protectors of this Nation, for King, Parliament, and People; and therefore, deserve a reciprocal indulgent and signal encouragement; the benefits of which, I may say, will centre in ourselves. The quotation I produce, is the following extract, from his late Majesty King George the Second's Speech to the Parliament, on the 27th of January 1727, the beginning of his reign, as follows:

“ I think myself obliged to recommend to you a consideration
 “ of the GREATEST IMPORTANCE, and I should look upon it a
 “ *great happiness*, if, at the beginning of my reign, I could see
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“ the foundation laid of so great and necessary work, as the increase
 “ and encouragement of our Seamen in general ; that they may be
 “ INVITED, rather than *compelled by force and violence*, to enter into
 “ the service of their country, as often as occasion shall require it :
 “ a consideration worthy of the representatives of a people, great
 “ and flourishing in trade and navigation.”

Upon the whole ; the establishment of the forementioned regulations by an act of the Legislature, will be a certain means for the recovering of the necessary dominion of the sea ; the support of our national prosperity, in our intercourses with, and dealings among, the states of the earth : such a dominion, as Britain possessed in the year 1762 ; (and, till the grand emissary of Satan, and his colleagues afterwards wrought the giving it up :) and will in all probability continue so in perpetuity ; till time shall be no more.

F I N I S.

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